WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT UNIT 8A - NORTH SLOPE, SUMMIT

Boundary Description

> **Summit county** - Boundary begins at the junction of Highway SR-150 and the Summit-Duchesne county line (summit of the Uinta Mountains); north along SR-150 to the Utah-Wyoming state line; east along this state line to the Brunt Fork-Birch Creek drainage divide; south along this drainage divide to the Burnt Fork-Sheep Creek drainage divide; south along this drainage divide to the Summit-Duchesne county line (summit of the Uinta Mountains); west along this county line to SR-150 and beginning point.

Unit Description

The North Slope, Summit Wildlife Management Unit is located along the north slope of the Uinta Mountains in Summit County. Unit 8A is a sub-unit of the North Slope Wildlife Management Unit. The other sub-unit, 8B, covers Daggett County. Elevation of unit 8A ranges from 7,500 feet to over 13,000 feet. Habitat varies from sagebrush and mountain brush communities to alpine tundra above the timberline which includes vast expanses of lodgepole pine. Several major drainages are located within the unit including: Bear River, Black's Fork, Smith's Fork, Henry's Fork, and Burnt Fork. Winter range in Utah is a critical limiting factor on the unit with many deer wintering in Wyoming.

In previous reports, the 5 trend study sites in this unit were included in Herd Unit 9 - Daggett. The study areas in herd unit 8A emphasize areas around Widdop Mountain and the Bald Range which are just west of the herd units eastern boundary and Burnt Fork-Birch Creek drainage divide. This area is considered important winter range for elk which summer on the north slope of the High Uinta mountains. According to the 1995 Big Game Harvest summary (Evans et. al 1995), there is approximately 365,000 acres of summer range on the unit, 88% of which is administered by the U.S. Forest Service. Private land owners control 11%, while the State of Utah administers 1%. There is about 35,100 acres of winter range with the majority (44%) being privately owned and another 42% administered by the Forest Service. The state owns 7%.

To meet the need for vegetative trend data on key elk winter ranges on the North Slope of the Uinta Mountains east of Beaver Creek, 6 new interagency range trend studies were established in the area in September 1988. The key areas are found on the mountain mahogany slopes of Phil Pico Mountain, Bald Range, Widdop Mountain, and Jessen Butte. These areas are mostly public land, although there is a considerable amount of private land in the Birch Creek and Beaver Creek drainages below the U.S. Forest boundary. The state of Utah owns several large sections, containing the study areas on Phil Pico Mountain (8B-8) and the Bald Range (8A-3 & 4). The study sites on Widdop Mountain (8A-1 & 2), including Telephone Hollow (8A-6), are on the Wasatch National Forest. The site on Phil Pico Mountain is now within sub-unit 8B and will be discussed in that section.

These sites receive moderate to heavy use by elk in the winter. Deer use is light to moderate in the winter with some summer use. Three of the 5 trend sites also show light winter use by moose, with year round antelope use of the area. Winter use by antelope and deer is dependent on weather conditions. All areas are permitted for livestock grazing. While the valleys are often heavily used by cattle, on-site observations indicate light or no use on the steep, mountain brush hillsides.

Unit Management Objectives

The management plan for Unit 8 (8A & 8B), includes a target herd size of 5,300 wintering deer with a composition of 15 bucks to 100 does. Thirty percent of the bucks are to be 3-point or better. The elk management objective is to achieve a target winter herd size of 2,100 (1,600 in Summit and West Daggett; and 500 in the Three Corners) with a minimum post season bull to cow ratio of 8:100. At least 4 of these bulls will be 2 ½ years of age or older.

Study Site Description

All range trend studies in Unit 8A sample the true (birchleaf) mountain mahogany range type. These studies provide a good representation of a majority of the key birchleaf mahogany winter range in the area. Except for Widdop Mountain North Slope (8A-2) which is situated on a north slope, the remainder of the study sites are located on south-facing slopes. These slopes tend to be moderately steep with rocky soil, typical of the dry, coarse, shallow soils often occupied by mountain mahogany.

All of the 5 trend study sites in sub-unit 8A were established in 1988 and reread in 1995. During the 2000 season, 4 of the 5 studies were reread with Bald Range South (8A-3) being discontinued due to it's close proximity and similarity with Bald Range (8A-4).

SUMMARY

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Five trend study sites were established on this management unit in 1988 and reread in 1995. In 2000, Bald Mtn. South (8A-3) was not reread due to its close proximity to Bald Mtn (8A-4). However, a pellet group transect was read and annual growth of mountain mahogany was measured. Three trend studies are located around Widdop Mountain and 2 are on the Bald Range. They all sample true mountain mahogany stands which are considered important elk winter range. Moose and to a lesser extent deer and antelope, also use these sites. Pellet group data from 2000 indicate an average of 43 elk use days/acre (106 edu/ha) on the five trend studies in unit 8A. A high of 66 elk days use/acre (163 edu/ha) was found on Widdop Mtn. South Slope (8A-1) and a low of 31 elk days use/acre (77 edu/ha) occurred at Telephone Hollow (8A-5). Moose use was found on 3 of the 5 sites, Widdop Mtn. South Slope (8A-1), Widdop Mtn. North Slope (8A–2) and Telephone Hollow (8A-5). Both Widdop Mtn. North Slope and Telephone Hollow had an estimated 16 moose days use/acre (40 mud/ha). Widdop Mtn. South Slope had 9 moose days use/acre (22 mdu/ha).

The key browse species on all 5 trend study sites consists of true mountain mahogany. Browse trends are currently stable on all sites but due to the dry conditions of 2000, annual leader growth averaged only 2.4 inches. Height/crown measurements also declined on 3 of the 4 sites. Browsing of mahogany was heavy in 2000, averaging 58%. Some of the increased heavy use in 2000 is likely due in part to poor leader growth which gives mahogany a more heavily hedged appearance. All of the mahogany populations on these sites are in good health with abundant young plants, stable mature populations, good vigor and low decadence.

Herbaceous trends are slightly down on 3 of the 4 sites but these trends will improve with a return to normal precipitation patterns.

Trend Summary

	Category	1982	1995	2000
8A-1 Widdop Mtn. South Slope	soil	est	3	3
	browse	est	3	3
	herbaceous understory	est	2	3
8A-2 Widdop Mtn North Slope	soil	est	5	3
	browse	est	3	3
	herbaceous understory	est	2	2
8A-3 Bald Range South	soil	est	3	NR
	browse	est	4	NR
	herbaceous understory	est	2	NR
8A-4 Bald Range	soil	est	3	3
	browse	est	3	3
	herbaceous understory	est	3	2

(1) = down, (2) = slightly down, (3) = stable, (4) = slightly up, (5) = up,
(est) = site established, (NR) = site not read

	Category	1982	1995	2000
8A-5 Telephone Hollow	soil	est	3	2
	browse	est	3	3
	herbaceous understory	est	4	2

(1) = down, (2) = slightly down, (3) = stable, (4) = slightly up, (5) = up,
(est) = site established, (NR) = site not read